

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A knock-down crate comprising:

- (a) a base having a length, a breadth, and an upper surface; and
- (b) a first pair of sides detachably engageable with said base for deployment parallel to said length and a second pair of sides detachably engageable with said base for deployment parallel to said breadth,

wherein said upper surface of said base features an elongated recess extending substantially the entirety of said length, said recess being sized for receiving said first and second pairs of sides such that, when said first and second pairs of sides are engaged with said base, said base and said sides define a four-sided crate with said recess contributing to an internal volume of said crate, and such that said first and second pairs of sides, when detached from said base, are receivable so as to be substantially contained within said recess for compact transportation.

2. The knock-down crate of claim 1, wherein said length is substantially equal to said breadth.

3. The knock-down crate of claim 2, wherein said first pair of sides and said second pair of sides are interchangeable.

4. The knock-down crate of claim 1, wherein said base and said first and second pairs of sides are all formed primarily from molded plastic material.

5. The knock-down crate of claim 1, wherein said base has a pair of elongated channels extending parallel to said length for receiving tines of a forklift mechanism.

6. The knock-down crate of claim 5, wherein a major part of said recess lies between said elongated channels.

7. The knock-down crate of claim 1, wherein said elongated recess is an open-ended recess extending the entirety of said length.

8. The knock-down crate of claim 7, wherein at least said second pair of sides each features a downwardly projecting tab configured to substantially close an end of said open-ended recess when said side is engaged with said base.

9. The knock-down crate of claim 8, said first pair of sides and said second pair of sides are interchangeable, said base including a pair of slots extending parallel to said length and configured for receiving said downwardly projecting tab of said first pair of sides.

10. The knock-down crate of claim 1, wherein said elongated recess is a closed-ended recess terminating at two end walls.

11. The knock-down crate of claim 10, wherein each side of said first and second pair of sides has a length no greater than a length of said closed-ended recess.

12. The knock-down crate of claim 1, wherein each side of said first and second pairs of sides includes attachment features for attachment to two adjacent sides, and wherein said attachment features are further configured such that each pair of said sides are doubly-interlockable to form a unit with said pair of sides associated in close parallel relation.

13. The knock-down crate of claim 1, wherein upper and lower edges of said first and second pairs of sides and upper and lower peripheral regions of said base are formed with complementary alignment projections and recesses such that, when said first and second pairs of sides are engaged with said base to form said four-sided crate, said alignment projections and recesses on said upper edges of said sides and on said lower peripheral region of said base serve to align said four-sided crate with similar crates placed above and below said four-sided crate, and when said first and second pairs of sides are received within said recess, said alignment projections and recesses on said upper and lower peripheral regions of said base serve to align said base with similar bases placed above and below said base.

14. A method for using a knock-down crate to transport produce from a loading location to an unloading location, the method comprising the steps of:

- (a) providing a knock-down crate having:
  - (i) a base with an upper surface including an elongated recess, and
  - (ii) four sides deployable in a crate configuration wherein said four sides are engaged with said base and each other to form a four-sided crate, said four sides being further deployable in a knock-down configuration wherein said four sides are received substantially within said elongated recess;
- (b) deploying said crate in said crate configuration;
- (c) loading said crate at the loading location with produce, at least part of the produce lying within said elongated recess;
- (d) transporting the produce in said crate to the unloading location;
- (e) unloading the produce from said crate; and
- (f) deploying said crate in said knock-down configuration with the four sides located substantially within said elongated recess for transport to a next loading location.

15. The method of claim 14, wherein upper and lower edges of said sides and upper and lower peripheral regions of said base are formed with

complementary alignment projections and recesses, the method further comprising:

- (a) stacking said crate when in said crate configuration with other similar crates such that said alignment projections and recesses on said upper edges of said sides and on said lower peripheral region of said base serve to align said crate with the other similar crates placed above and below said crate; and
- (b) stacking said crate when in said knock-down configuration with other similar crates such that said alignment projections and recesses on said upper and lower peripheral regions of said base serve to align said crate with the other similar crates placed above and below said crate.